jpost.com

Sanctioning Dodik won't bring a Muslim apocalypse, just accountability for his crimes - opinion

MUSTAFA CERIC

6–8 minutes

ByMUSTAFA CERIC
APRIL 19, 2026 19:00

In engaging with the opinion advanced by Marc Zell, one encounters not merely a policy argument but a broader attempt to recast the moral and historical terrain of Bosnia. Such arguments deserve careful scrutiny, particularly when they invoke civilizational anxieties and selectively reinterpret both legal realities and historical experience.

At the heart of this debate lies a fundamental question: whether the enforcement of legal accountability – through sanctions or other mechanisms – constitutes destabilization, or whether it is, in fact, the precondition for any durable peace.

As previously established, the conduct of Milorad Dodik – his defiance of constitutional authority, his rejection of binding judicial decisions, and his denial of genocide – places him outside the normative boundaries that democratic societies must uphold. To portray sanctions as an attack on communal balance rather than a response to individual conduct is to obscure responsibility and dissolve the distinction between law and identity.

The misuse of civilizational narratives

A particularly troubling aspect of the argument is its reliance on a civilizational framing that casts Bosnia's Bosniaks (Muslim) population as a conduit for external, allegedly destabilizing influences. This narrative not only lacks empirical grounding but also risks reintroducing precisely the kind of ethno-religious

essentialism that the post-war order sought to transcend.

The state of Bosnia is not a proxy battleground of civilizations; it is a pluralistic society whose stability depends on the coexistence of its constituent peoples under a shared legal framework.

The flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina (credit: SHUTTERSTOCK)

The Dayton Peace Agreement did not enshrine division as a permanent condition, but rather established a structure within which coexistence could gradually be normalized. To reinterpret this framework as a zero-sum struggle between ethnically religious blocs is to regress toward the very logic that produced conflict.

The Sarajevo Haggadah and the ethics of historical memory

It is here that the invocation of Jewish history, particularly the symbolism of the Sarajevo Haggadah, requires both precision and care. The Haggadah, preserved through centuries of upheaval, including during World War II, stands as a testament to the protection afforded to Jewish heritage by the people of Bosnia, in particular its Muslim community. During the Holocaust, local actors, namely Bosnian Muslims, risked their lives to safeguard this manuscript from destruction, an act that has become emblematic of interfaith solidarity.

This historical record does not support claims of a “unique tradition of antisemitism” among Bosniaks. Rather, it illustrates a distinctive legacy of coexistence and protection. Indeed, Bosnia’s Jewish community has often pointed to this history as evidence of a

broader civic ethos that transcended religious division even in times of extreme peril.

To draw upon Jewish symbols in order to advance a narrative that stigmatizes another community is therefore not only historically inaccurate but ethically problematic. The memory embodied in the Sarajevo Haggadah calls for humility, solidarity, and the defense of truth, not its instrumentalization in contemporary political disputes.

Accountability is not bias

The assertion that sanctions against Dodik represent a pro-Bosniak or “pro-Muslim” bias misunderstands the nature of international legal enforcement. Sanctions are not imposed on the basis of identity but on the basis of conduct. The international judgments concerning the Srebrenica genocide – delivered by institutions such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia – are not contingent upon ethnic or religious affiliation; they are determinations grounded in evidence, procedure, and law.

To deny these findings, or to frame their acknowledgment as partisan, is to erode the universality of justice itself. If legal accountability can be dismissed as bias whenever it affects one group, then the very possibility of impartial justice collapses.

Europe, sovereignty, and the limits of revisionism

The broader geopolitical framing of the argument, linking Bosnia’s internal dynamics to fears of external influence, also warrants reconsideration. While vigilance regarding foreign interference is legitimate, it cannot serve as a pretext for undermining the sovereignty and constitutional order of the state and society of Bosnia. Secessionist rhetoric, particularly when coupled with the rejection of international agreements, aligns less with the defense of Europe than with the erosion of its foundational principles.

In this regard, the contrast between European integration and revisionist politics becomes salient. The former is grounded in the rule of law, mutual recognition, and the acceptance of shared norms; the latter seeks to renegotiate settled questions through unilateral action and historical reinterpretation. The trajectory

chosen by politicians such as Russian President Vladimir Putin – with whom Dodik has often been politically aligned – illustrates the risks inherent in the latter path.

The responsibility of honest argument

A civilizational argument worthy of the name must be anchored in truth, not in selective memory or rhetorical inversion. Bosnia's future depends not on the triumph of one community over another but on the consistent application of law, the preservation of historical truth, and the rejection of narratives that reduce complex societies to simplistic binaries.

Sanctions against Milorad Dodik are not an affront to balance; they are an affirmation of principle. To remove them in the absence of meaningful change would not correct an injustice. It would legitimize a pattern of behavior that undermines both domestic stability and international norms.

In the end, the lesson of the Sarajevo Haggadah is not one of division but of shared responsibility: to protect what is fragile, to remember what is true, and to resist the temptation to bend history in the service of the present.

The writer is the grand mufti of Bosnia.